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**From:** CN=Jeff Frithsen/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US [CN=Jeff Frithsen/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US]  
**Sent:** 6/8/2011 8:10:09 PM  
**To:** CN=Palmer Hough/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA  
**Subject:** Fw: From Greenwire -- MINING: Top EPA officials visit Alaska to assess Bristol Bay watershed  
**Attachments:** Hotspot; Land Letter; Greenwire; Greenwire; Click here; [www.eenews.net](http://www.eenews.net); Click here

Palmer..... FYI.....

Jeff

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MINING: Top EPA officials visit Alaska to assess Bristol Bay watershed (Wednesday, June 8, 2011)

Manuel Quinones, E&E reporter

U.S. EPA leaders visited southwest Alaska last week for a firsthand look at the site of a proposed gold and copper mine in the Bristol Bay watershed.

The agency delegation -- led by senior policy counsel Bob Sussman and Nancy Stoner, a deputy assistant administrator in the Office of Water -- visited several communities around the proposed Pebble Mine and held information sessions about mining regulations and methods.

"Bristol Bay is an important resource in Alaska," Hanady Kader, an EPA Region 10 spokeswoman, said in response to submitted questions. "The agency took the opportunity to send senior officials up there to see the landscape and hear from communities firsthand."

Despite EPA's efforts to describe their Bristol Bay assessment as a broad review that is not focused on the proposed mine, agency officials are aware their work is being watched closely in a heated fight over the mine (Land Letter, Feb. 24). "This is going to be a huge decision for the Agency," Dennis McLerran, EPA Region 10 administrator based in Seattle, told the Anchorage Daily News. The mine's boosters say the project will provide a huge economic boost, while its foes say the mine will threaten what they say is the country's largest and most valuable salmon fishery.

EPA officials met with both sides during their visit.

"We spoke our peace," said Everett Thompson, a fisherman and mine opponent who flew about 30 minutes from Naknek to Newhalen to attend an EPA meeting. Though the mine has aroused passions in southwest Alaska, he said the meeting was far from heated.

"We got along, we were very cordial," Thompson said.

Although company officials have pledged that the mine will not damage the Bristol Bay fishery, project foes say the mine -- which could be up to 2 miles wide and 1,700 feet deep and generate up to 10 billion tons of toxic waste -- would threaten a fishery that generates about \$450 million a year and employs about 12,000 people.

During a visit to the proposed Pebble Mine site, a mine company official discussed environmental studies and preliminary findings, spokesman Mike Heatwole said.

"We also appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective about what we actually are doing and how we are methodically working our way through our engineering and environmental studies initiatives," Heatwole said in an email.

Executives with the Pebble Limited Partnership -- an alliance between London-based Anglo American PLC and Vancouver, British Columbia-based Northern Dynasty Minerals Ltd. -- have approved spending roughly \$100 million this year for exploration and environmental studies necessary for the permitting process.

A preliminary assessment released earlier this year by the developers indicate that the project, located about 200 miles southwest of Anchorage, could produce 53 billion pounds of copper and 50 million ounces of gold over roughly eight decades while developing 55 percent of the known mineral resource (Greenwire, May 3).

"We continue to emphasize that we believe any action by the EPA is premature at this time as we have not yet defined a development project for the Pebble deposit nor have we initiated permitting," Heatwole added.

The partnership could begin the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process late next year. And company executives say, upon reaching commercial production, if it ever does, the mine could be one of the world's top producers of gold, copper and molybdenum, which is used in manufacturing motors and aircraft parts.

In a recent interview after testifying on Capitol Hill, Dan Sullivan, the state's natural resources commissioner, did not take sides in the Pebble controversy. But he appeared to chafe about what he described as EPA's encroachment into state regulatory responsibilities.

"A lot of clarity on the study that they are undertaking is important from the state's perspective," he said. "More information would be very useful."

#### PR battle

Meanwhile, supporters and opponents of the mine have mounted aggressive public relations campaigns.

Opponents have recruited actor Robert Redford, gold company executives and celebrity chefs to join their effort (Greenwire, March 30). Supporters and those who claim neutrality cite potential economic benefits to the area.

Two entities have squared off over the issue: Nunamata Aulukestai -- a group of eight village corporations whose name means "caretakers of the land" -- and Nuna Resources, which has been urging people to give the mine a chance under the banner of "due process."

Mine opponents have been trying to discredit Nuna because the Pebble Partnership has provided some of the group's funding and a company consultant sits on its board.

Nunamata leaders Kimberly Williams and Bobby Andrew told their supporters last month: "If you are contacted by Nuna Resources, rest assured you really are getting a message from Pebble Partnership and Anglo American."

"It's unfortunate," Heatwole said about efforts to discredit Nuna. "The people promoting Nuna Resources have legitimate concerns about the issues and the economy in southwest Alaska."

Nuna leader Abe Williams did not return a call and email for comment in time for publication. But Williams said in an interview earlier this year, "This project is important to the region to diversity economics. We have seen a very large out-migration of our community members over a period of years. And it's had a dramatic effect on our communities. They've shut down some schools; we've lost students."

Mine opponents, who are receiving support from environmental and conservation groups like Trout Unlimited, say the area's future is, in large part, tied to the health of the fishery. Saying both large-scale mining and a healthy fishery cannot coexist, they are putting a lot of their hopes on the EPA assessment, which is expected to be completed next year.

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